

Messenger!

A Journey Through the Burden of Malachi

Malachi 2:17-3:6

10- Refiner's Fire, Fuller's Soap, and the Messenger of the Covenant

October 20, 2019

Malachi 2:17-3:6

17 You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, "How have we wearied *Him*?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them," or, "Where is the God of justice?"

3:1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts.

2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.

3 "He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.

4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

5 "Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the Lord of hosts.

6 "For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

To the Glory of God

Now, to those who will repent and believe, the Gospel is the truly the *Best News* in all the world. But to those who *refuse* to repent, and

who *refuse* to believe, this same Gospel is the *Worst* News they could ever hear. The *glorious* Gospel, that offers a Forgiveness and a Righteousness that has not been earned by unworthy sinners, is the *fearful* Gospel that damns the hard-hearted and the impenitent.

Those of us, who are saved, look at those who are not and we wonder. We marvel that they don't see, that they don't hear, and we are amazed that they don't believe. And we ask, "*How can they not hear God? How can they not see? How could they not believe?*" To be blind to that which is the most Beautiful is truly tragic. To be deaf to that which is the most Lovely is heartbreaking. To be hard-hearted and stubborn against that which is the Sweetest and the most Precious is truly a shame. Many hundreds of years before Jesus was born, the Prophet Ezekiel spoke in the place of God about this very Issue and he said:

Ezekiel 18:29b-32

... the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord God. "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord God. "Therefore, repent and live."

... what an Offer! And yet, they leave God's Presence unbent, unbowed, and unchanged. It is nothing short of *fascinating* to hear the complaint of the lost, pagan world against God. They *refuse* to bow before Him, they *don't* love Him, they have *no* desire to obey Him, they live their lives in abject *rebellion* to Him, they *ignore* what He says, and *most* don't really believe He exists. And yet, they have the *audacity* to desire a good and secure and happy and prosperous life, all the while living in open and blatant rebellion to the Owner and the Creator of the Universe! And then, to add insult to injury, they *bitterly* complain when trouble or hardship arrives.

So, while those of us, who are genuinely saved, wait with great eagerness the Second Coming of our wonderful Lord, the Return of

Jesus to this earth will be the very *worst* day possible for those who have refused to bow.

So, at about 400 years before the Birth of the Incarnate God to an insignificant virgin, the Spirit of God moved along an obscure man, named Malachi. And in the first part of verse 17, God *compelled* this man to stand up before his brethren and proclaim the Word of the Lord:

You have wearied the Lord with your words...

How terrible! Malachi is saying here that the one, true, and living God has been literally *exhausted* by their continual complaining, their undying bellyaching, and their unceasing murmuring. Now if God told me that, it would break my heart. After all God had done, after all God had graciously given, and after all God had spoken, these people now had a complaint against God that He was *promoting* Evil? That God was no longer Just? And that God was not *defending* them? Here was the complaint of the people against God:

"Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them," or, "Where is the God of justice?"

So, during these days it seemed as though Evil was flourishing. Wicked people were so prosperous that it seemed as though the Lord actually *avored* them. And so, the Jew began to cry out, **"Where is the God of Justice?"** *"Why doesn't God defend us? Why does He allow wicked people to prosper? Why doesn't He stop this?"*

And to answer this, we must remember the History of the Jew. Jewish people have been the most persecuted and the most enslaved people in the History of Mankind. All through time, People after People, Nation after Nation, and Empire after Empire have come into the Promised Land, and have violently and brutally subjugated the people of God. Even as Malachi was in his Ministry, it had been less than 100 years since the Jew had escaped the Captivity of the Babylonians and had returned to their land.

But what the Jews didn't want to think about was that the only Reason God raised up pagan and evil people to periodically come and vanquish His Own people was because the Jew *refused* to follow the Lord in glad Obedience. As strange as it may seem to us, the people

would “forget” God. And they would build altars to the false gods of the lost world, and they would act as though they had *not* been graciously called out from the world to be God’s people. We must remember that God had sovereignly given these people their language, their culture, their religion, their Government, and even their land. Their very existence as a people was owing to God and His Mercy. And so, it was not as though God had been distant to them, or had spoken vaguely, or was hidden in a corner. His Mercy was ever-present with them. So, when the hard-hearted and stiff-necked Jew forgot God, it was hard to be any more insulting. And so, basically, God had told them:

If you will not serve Me, you will serve the pagan.
If you do not bow to Me, you will bow to them.

And so, an amazing Process began. The brutal subjugation of wicked pagans would humble the Jew. And when they had been forcibly humbled, they would remember what their lives were supposed to be about. And that Awakening led to them to repent and turn back to God. And as they turned back to God, they would cast off their idols and their graven images, and God would show them Mercy and raise up a Deliverer and rescue them.

But then it wasn’t long before the lusts of the flesh, and the lusts of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life would overwhelm them, and the cycle of Subjugation, Humility, Repentance, and Deliverance would repeat itself over and over again.

And here, during the Days of Malachi’s Ministry, even though God had shown them Mercy by a great Deliverance, for the most part, the Jews had, once again, become very sinful, very worldly, and very carnal. And so, God was *withholding* His Mercy. And He refused to hear their Prayers, or accept their Sacrifices.

Yet, what made this so odd is that the Jew acted *bewildered* as to *why* a Good and Sovereign God would allow Evil to triumph over them, even though this had happened multiple times before. But, in their own self-righteousness they would cry out, “*Why, Lord? I mean, have You forgotten that we are Your chosen people? Don’t you remember that we are the seed of Abraham? Have You forgotten that we are special? And so, as precious as we are, You should defend us better and not allow these pagan Gentiles to triumph over us!*”

So, instead of being humbled this time, instead of considering their ways, and instead of repenting, they complained that God was not treating them correctly, and that He was actually *promoting* Injustice against them! Amazing!

So, in response to their sinful complaining, God tells them, through Malachi, what He is going to do:

Malachi 3:1a
Behold...

The very first thing God tells these sinful Jews is: Behold! See! Look! *"You think I am promoting Injustice? You must be blind. You think I am favoring Evil over Good? Then you can't see clearly. You think I delight in wicked men? Then open your eyes and look! I want you to stand at attention and behold what I am going to do!"*, and then Malachi reveals to them how God is going to Act:

I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts.

Now the way the original Hebrew is worded here tells us that God is actually being sarcastic when He says:

... the Lord, whom you seek.... The messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight ...

... because they weren't seeking the Lord, *at all*. They weren't delighting in the Lord, *at all*. They were seeking to defraud one another. They were seeking to offer God the sick and lame and diseased animals for Sacrifices, while they kept the best ones for themselves. They were delighting in Sin, and in worldly pleasure, and in mistreating other people. They were seeking to act treacherously in their personal relationships, and by marrying unsaved women, and in divorcing their wives. So, this generation of Jews had truly forgotten God. And they had forgotten that the way saved people live their lives is the measuring stick as to how much they really believe, and how

much they actually love God, and whether their Salvation experience is actually genuine. The Apostle John echoed this Reality when he wrote:

1 John 4:20

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

Now the word “**hate**”, as used here, is not talking about the vicious, brutal emotion that wishes harm to other people. No, this is talking about the *absence* of Love. So, this is being *unconcerned* and *uncaring* about brothers and sisters in Christ, not trying to hurt them. This has more to do with them simply “not caring” about their Covenant brothers and sisters than it does with seeking injury.

So, if we don't *care* about our brothers and sisters, if we are so caught up in our own issues that we lose the ability to be *concerned*, or if we simply have no desire to be *inconvenienced* by the plight of those whom God has chosen to save and bring into His Church, then John says here we are liars, and we do NOT love God, and we are deceived about our own Salvation.

So, what were some of the Sins of the Jews of Malachi's Day that had so troubled God that He raised up this Prophet to rebuke them? Look again at verses 4&5:

Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the Lord of hosts.

So, *after* God has sent His Messenger to clear the way before Him, *after* God has sent the Lord suddenly to His Temple, God said:

- ✓ **Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years**
- ✓ **Then I will draw near to you for judgment**
- ✓ **[Then] I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers**
- ✓ **[Then I will be a swift witness against] the adulterers**

- ✓ [Then I will be a swift witness against] **those who swear falsely**
- ✓ [Then I will be a swift witness against] **those who oppress the wage earner in his wages**
- ✓ [Then I will be a swift witness against those who oppress] **the widow and the orphan**
- ✓ [Then I will be a swift witness against those] **who turn aside the alien**

So, these were the great Sins that had become commonplace in Israel among God's people during the Days of Malachi. And these are the Issues that will be corrected when the Lord sends His Messenger and purifies the people. Now some of these Issues are fairly straightforward, but there are some Issues here that usually aren't even mentioned when discussing grievous Sins. And yet, God says these are very important to Him. And every one of these different manifestations of Sin could all be summed up by a single overriding Factor, a single Sin, that was the main Catalyst that brought about all the other different manifestations of Sin:

[They] **do not fear Me**

Now the Old Testament usage of the "Fear of the Lord" is a catch-all phrase that can be equated to the New Testament concept of "trust". All through the Bible, in both the Old and New Covenants, what is required of sinners to be saved is Faith. We *believe* to be forgiven and saved. And then we *keep on* believing to be sanctified and made holy. And so, wrapped up in the idea of *continuous believing* is this notion of this "godly Fear" or "reverential Respect".

So, for example, if the people had the Fear of the Lord present in their lives, if they trusted in God, they would have never engaged in Offerings and Sacrifices with deficient animals. If the people had believed God and believed what God said, if they had a true, reverential Respect for God, they would not be able to go a single day in the worship of false gods without being convicted and without casting those idols away.

You see, part of being Born from above is the wondrous destruction or the elimination of the *tyrannical domination* that Sin once had over us. So, while it is true that we still periodically sin, it is

also true that Sin no longer *dominates* our minds or our thoughts or our hearts or our actions like it did when we were lost.

So, there is simply no way that a truly redeemed soul can live, *long term*, in unrepentant Sexual Sins, or in *not* keeping Covenant, or breaking their Oaths or their Vows or their Promises. If people are genuinely *trusting* in Jesus Christ, if there is a strong and healthy and biblical Fear of the Lord present, God's people, who own businesses, will NOT oppress their Employees, they will NOT neglect Widows and Orphans, and the true, biblical reverential Respect for the one, true, and living God, working inside the believer, as he trusts in God, will NOT allow him to mistreat legitimate Refugees who enter their country seeking asylum.

So, while some of our "hot-button" Issues are not even mentioned in this Passage, these are the Issues that matter to the Lord. And they have *always* mattered to Him, which is *why* they are repeated over and over again all throughout the Bible. And so, even though we pay much more attention to the flashier and the more visible Sins, and those that garner much more publicity, these are the basic, down-to-earth Issues of Life that matter to God, and that illustrate whether we truly belong to Jesus or not.

And let me be clear about this. Being saved *always, always, always* produces in the believer a trust, a strong, healthy Fear of God. And this reverential Respect, this Fear of the Lord, always, always, always *modifies* our behavior along the lines of these particular Issues.

But just how will these Issues be corrected when the Lord sends His Messenger? Look again at verses 2&3:

... He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver...

... so, this Messenger that God will send will act as two things to God's people:

- 1. Refiner's Fire**
- 2. Fuller's Soap**

... and what is the Promise that God gives that will come to pass as a result of God's Messenger being like a Fire from a Refiner and like Fuller's Soap?

... so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.

... so, all their Offerings will be bathed in that humble and joyful Obedience. And so, as the Messenger acts as a Refiner's Fire, and like Fuller's Soap, *purifying* and *sanctifying* and *transforming* and radically *altering* their daily lives, a powerful and glorious manifestation of Righteousness will be produced.

Now remember that the people, to whom Malachi speaks all this, have almost *universally* adopted the ways of the world. They have "left off" serving God, and, almost to a man, they had *abandoned* the 39 Scriptures they had at that time. They had *capitulated* the most serious and most sacred Issues to their own carnal ambitions and desires.

So, they weren't asking God to "make them Holy". They weren't asking God to *cause* them to become humble and joyful and obedient bond-slaves. They weren't seeking to become pleasing in God's Eyes. No, they were complaining about how the pagans were treating them. They were accusing God or favoring Evil over the Good. They were asking God how He could consider Himself "Just" when unbelieving Gentiles were running roughshod over the people of God.

And notice that, in God's Answer, not a Word is given about anything that He might do to the pagans. Not one syllable is uttered about any Judgment against the Babylonians or the Persians or the Midianites or the Gaddites or the Jebusites or the Greeks or the Romans or the Philistines. All God speaks here is how the people of God are going to be transformed when God sends His Messenger. All Malachi speaks about is how much Sin and Self-centered living is going to be altered once the Messenger acts like a Refiner's Fire and like Fuller's Soap. Because, the Goal of God in sending His Messenger is:

He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver...

... which is why the Prophet asks a very important Question:

But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?

And this goes back to what I said in my Introduction. While those, who have been truly saved wait with *eager* Anticipation for the Return of Jesus to this earth, that Day will be the very *worst* day imaginable for those who have *refused* to bow and who will *not* repent. The Day that we look forward to, with great Joy, will be a Day of Dread and Despair for those who lived according to the dictates of their own hearts. The Event that *dominates* the New Testament, when Jesus splits the sky and returns to this earth, will be a Day that will cause what John saw in **The Revelation 6:12-17**:

I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

So, Malachi says to the people of God, *"Maybe you really don't want the Messenger to come after all. Maybe you would rather just keep going like you are. Because when He comes, everything will change. Nothing will stay the same. You will change. All of your Plans will be altered. Every Office and Position and Occupation and Job will be radically transformed. And every human being will either be transformed in the Fire of the Refiner or you will burn forever in a devil's Hell. So, are you sure you want God to send the Messenger?"*

Now I want you to notice that Malachi didn't speak about a "Forest Fire", or an "Incinerator's Fire". No, this Prophet was "moved along" to speak about a *Refiner's Fire*. You see, a Forest Fire destroys *indiscriminately*. It just burns without Plan or Purpose or Direction. And an Incinerator consumes whatever it touches *completely*. So, the

Goal of a Forest Fire is *total* Destruction, and the Goal of an Incinerator is *total* Annihilation. But look again at verse 6:

For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

Now, for many years, when I read this Passage, all I got was that God was very angry with these people. And, while I would give lip service to my belief in God's Sovereignty, I really had a very primitive and a very vague and a very simple and basic understanding of what it means for God to be Sovereign, *especially* in Salvation. Like many others, I had a "Man-centered" view of Salvation, and what little Theology I had about almost any subject was *decisively* "Man-centered".

The Sovereignty of God was an Issue that everybody I was associated with talked about, but which nobody ever discussed. In almost 30 years of being a part of the Pentecostal Movement, I can't remember a single Question, a single Discussion, or a single Study that I was ever a part of that would teach me what the Bible actually meant about God's Absolute Sovereignty, or about what the practical implications were to God being Sovereign.

Now, I'm not saying that things were Evil back then. I believe that I was fully saved and that many of the people I was associated with were truly born again. But the Bible Studies and the Sermons and the Lessons, and even the Music, were all grossly contradictory, unbelievably confusing, incomplete, and terribly inconsistent. And the Result of not knowing was that we would all lift our hands and genuinely worship a God, Who we said was "Sovereign", and then we would go about to preach and teach and rejoice about "Human Choice" and "Human Self-Determinism", and the absolute sacredness and autonomy of our own "Free-Will".

But **Malachi 3:6** reveals the Beauty and the Glory of God's Sovereignty in Salvation *better* than almost any other verse in the Bible. Here Malachi quotes God as saying:

For I, the Lord, do not change ...

... which of course gives us insight into one of the most important Characteristics of God that is revealed in the entire Bible called the

"Immutability of God". So, God is "Immutable". Another way of understanding this is to say, "God is NOT "mutable". And that is simply a "three-dollar word" that tells us that God doesn't change. But this *Immutability* should be understood in two different ways:

1. God *Himself* doesn't change.
2. God never changes His *Mind*, or His *Plans*, or His *Will*.

"Who God is", *personally*, in all the specifics of His pristine Nature and Character, never changes. So, the way God exists right now is the very *same way* that God has *always* existed. God has never been something at some point in the past other than the way He is right now. God has never developed new Qualities or new Aspects of His Nature. He has never learned new things. When I see my Sin, and, with God's Help, I overcome some of my many sinful tendencies, I actually and literally become *more* godly and *more* righteous. But God has *never* become more Holy or more Righteous. He has *always* been *perfectly* Pure, and *perfectly* Righteous, and *perfectly* Glorious, and *perfectly* Powerful, because He is *perfectly* Holy. So, God has never changed. The one, true, and living God, Who is revealed in the pages of the 39 Books of the Old Testament, is the very *same* God Who is the Father of Jesus Christ in the 27 Books of the New.

And a lot of people would agree with that. But the practical *application* of that Reality is that, not only does God *Himself* never change, but also *whatever God has determined to do never changes, either*. So, *whatever* God has decreed (in Eternity Past) will happen, will come to pass, *exactly* as God has decreed it. That is *also* what it means for God to be "Immutable". Because *whatever* God has decided to do, whatever He has promised, and whatever He has decreed, is *perfect*. It could not *ever* be improved, in any way. It is full and complete and entire, and does not contain any ambiguities, at all. There are no contingencies that God either didn't know about, or plan for, or forgot. And so, nothing could possibly happen that would cause God to change His Mind, precisely because God knows *everything* about *everything*. God understands the Future *perfectly*, because He controls the Future, *absolutely*. And God also sovereignly controls *every* area of Creation.

So, there are no Acts of Men or Satan, no Decisions, and no Choices that have the ability to thwart God's Will, or God's Plans, or God's Decrees, or that have the ability to cause God's Promises to fail. *That* is what it means for God to be "Immutable". And so, *whatever* God has said is just that way. *Whatever* He has determined to do will happen. And *whatever* He has promised will come to pass, *exactly* as He has said. And that means that we can trust what God says. We can put all our Hope in His Word. And we can build our lives and stake our Eternities on what God has promised. And that, too, is what God's "Immutability" means. Now look at what Malachi says the result is because God is Immutable:

... therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

In other words, the people have turned their backs on God and are promoting Sin and Worldliness. They are being faithless and deceitful in their Relationships, and they are bringing accusation after accusation against God. So, the people are "neck deep" in rebellion and are in serious Trouble with God. And if God could change, He wouldn't work with them at all. He would merely destroy them, and go and choose another people. So, if God was "mutable", the "sons of Jacob", which is simply referring to the Jews, would be consumed by God's Wrath. So, because He is Immutable, look at what God says He is going to do with these stiff-necked and hard-hearted people:

He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver...

... and that is because God is a "Refiner's Fire", and He is like "Fuller's Soap". So, God is NOT trying to *consume* them. He is NOT trying to *annihilate* them. God is NOT trying to *destroy* them. No, God is going to *purify* them! Why? Look back at **Malachi 1:2&3a:**

**I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have You loved us?"
"Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob;
but I have hated Esau...**

God has "set His Love" upon these people. God has called them and chosen them and set them aside for His Own Glory. So, God has made a Covenant with them. And what was that Covenant:

You shall be My people and I will be your God

... and so, the only reason that God does not throw these sinful people away, and go and get another group, is because God is Immutable and doesn't change. And He has already called them by His Own Name and for His Own Name's sake. And so, it is the despised Doctrine of "Sovereign Election" that causes God to *refine* them rather than *destroy* them.

So, this is both a Message of Warning and a Message of great Hope. And, therefore, Purity and Holiness will *always* be both a glorious *and* a dreadful thing. There will always be a proper "fear and trembling" in the process of becoming Pure. We learn it from the time we are little children: "*Never play with fire!*" And we also learn, "*Some of what Mother uses to clean with will hurt you!*" And that's a good lesson! Therefore, Christianity is never a play-thing. And the Passion for Purity is never flippant. God Himself is like Fire, and Fire is serious. You don't fool around with it. And God is like the strongest cleansing agent.

Now, notice that God also said He was like "Fuller's Soap". Now, those of us who are over 50 years of age remember when there were door-to-door salesmen from the "Fuller Brush Company", who would come to your home to sell brushes and soap. Malachi didn't know anything about the Fuller Brush Company, but he did know what a "Fuller" was, and what "Fuller's Soap" was.

The English word "full" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word "fullian", which means: "*to whiten.*" So, to "full" clothes was to press or scour them in a mill. And this was a very ancient art. The trade of the fullers, in the Bible, appears to have consisted chiefly in cleansing garments and whitening them. The process of "fulling" or "cleansing" clothes consisted in treading or stamping the garments with the feet in large tubs of water, in which some alkaline substance had been dissolved. And usually, there were two different cleansing agents involved:

1. Lye (**Proverbs 25:20; Jeremiah 2:22**)
2. Soap (**Malachi 3:2**)

... while the Romans used both human and animal urine along with chalk.

Now the trade of the fullers caused terrible odors, and it also required lots of space for drying the clothes. So, for that reason, fullers plied their trade *outside* the city limits of Jerusalem. The unbleached cotton is soaked in water, and then sprinkled with the powdered lye and soap, and then beaten in heaps on a flat stone either with another stone or with a large wooden paddle. The cloth is then washed free from the lye and soap by small boys treading on it in a running stream. In **Mark 9:3**, John Mark describes Jesus' garments at the time of His Transfiguration as being whiter than any fuller on earth could whiten them.¹

Now if you got any of this lye or soap on your skin, it would sting. So, "Fuller's Soap" was known to the Jew of that day not only for its *cleansing* abilities, but also because of its *sting*. So, when Malachi uses it here, it is referring to a *spiritual purifying process* that involved Pain or a Sting. So, look again at what God said:

He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

When will the Offerings of Judah and Jerusalem become pleasing to the Lord again? When will the "Sons of Levi" be able to present to the Lord "Offerings in Righteousness"? When the Messenger of the Covenant comes, the Lord...

... will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver ...

Now the way a Smelter works is that they turn the Furnace up to a very high heat. And both gold and silver are metals. So, while they

¹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com> > dictionary > fuller

can melt, metal won't burn up. But all the impurities, all the hay, wood, and stubble that is *attached* to the gold and silver will burn up. And so, the Furnace is turned up hot so that all that is not gold and all that is not silver will be burned off. And the Furnace is so hot that it even eviscerates dirt.

So, as the impurities are burned off, the gold and silver become liquified. And the liquid gold and silver is then poured into a mold. So, the gold and silver lose the shape and the ingredients that they had when they were dug out of the ground. And now both the silver and gold take the shape of the mold.

So, as God takes us out from the fallen world to save us, we still have impurities in us. We are all creatures of the dirt, and so, we all have habits and personality traits and attributes and characteristics that are not pleasing to God. So, even though we have been born again and have been justified and have been adopted into the family of God,- we still have great need to be made Holy.

So, in His Mercy, And through His great Love, God desires that we share in His Own Holiness. But Sin stops that from happening. So, in order to give us the Best that Heaven has, *Himself*, God has to *purify* us. This is the life-long Process called "Sanctification". It is the ongoing and progressive Process whereby God burns off the hay, wood, and stubble of things like Unforgiveness, and Unbelief, and Jealousy, and Malice, and Strife, and Self-righteousness, and various other worldly and carnal and earthly Attributes that attached itself to us in our mother's womb.

And the Fire of Purification gets so hot that we literally melt underneath it. And as we are liquefied, we are poured into the Mold of our Savior, Jesus Christ. So, the Goal of Sanctification is that we are molded and shaped and formed into the very Image and Likeness of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. We lose our own identify, we hide behind the Cross, we decrease and Jesus increases in our lives, and people no longer see us, they see the Treasure of Heaven, the Lord Jesus Himself!

Now, to unfold this Passage, let me present four Questions, and point you to their Answers from what Malachi wrote here:

1. Who is like a Refiner's Fire and Fuller's Soap?
2. Why must He be like a Refiner's Fire and Fuller's Soap?

3. How can we experience His Fire and His Soap as “refining” and not consuming or destroying?
4. What is Life like for us when we are in the Refiner's Fire and as we are being washed with Fuller’s Soap?

1. Who Is Like a Refiner's Fire and Fuller’s Soap?

Malachi 3:1

Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi talks about three different people here:

1. "I"
2. God’s Messenger, who clears the Way before the Lord
3. The Messenger of the Covenant

The first Individual mentioned is "I". God says:

Behold, I send . . . "

... and Who this "I" is, is identified at the end of the Verse:

... says the Lord of hosts.

... so, now we know that the Speaker here is God the Father, the “Lord of hosts”.

The second Individual mentioned is “God’s Messenger” who God is going to raise up, and who will clear the Way before the Lord Himself. Malachi said:

Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me...

... so, who is this? Well, the New Testament quotes this very verse to identify "John the Baptist", as the one who God raised up to prepare the Way before Jesus at His First Advent.

Matthew 11:7-15

As these men were going *away*, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft *clothing*? Those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings' palaces! But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, '*BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.*' Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen *anyone* greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept *it*, John himself is Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Here Jesus references two different verses from this very Book of Malachi to identify who John the Baptist really was and what he would do:

Malachi 3:1

Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi 4:5&6

Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.

But you really don't have to read from the New Testament that this Messenger is a Prophet whom God would raise up in the last day. It says right there in **Malachi 4:5**, that God is going to send "Elijah the

Prophet". So, when Jesus referred to John the Baptist as Elijah in **Matthew 11**, He was referencing this very Prophecy from Malachi.

So, the *first* "Messenger" that Malachi mentions in 3:1 that God is going to send to clear the Way is a "kind" or a "type" of Elijah, or one who would come "like" Elijah. And that is *exactly* what the arch-Angel Gabriel told Zacharias, in **Luke 1:13b-17**:

... Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, **TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."**

Now the *third* Individual mentioned in **Malachi 3:1** is described in two ways:

- **The Lord, whom you seek, [Who] will suddenly come to His Temple**
- **The Messenger of the Covenant, in Whom you delight**

Now this is a completely *different* "Messenger" from the one who would "clear the Way" before the Lord (John the Baptist). *This* "Messenger" is the long-awaited Messiah, Jesus, the Christ. Now how do we know that? Three things point to *this* "Messenger" being Jesus:

1. He is called "**Lord**", a term that Malachi would *never* apply to Elijah or John the Baptist or any other Prophet. This Person is someone *infinitely* greater than any Prophet.
2. The Temple is said to belong to Him. Malachi said that this Messenger will suddenly come to "**HIS Temple**." Again, no human being, no Priest, no Prophet owns the Temple of God.
3. *This* Messenger is *identical* with God the Father, not only because the Temple is HIS Temple, but also because He seems to take the place of the word "Me" in the first half of the verse. It says:

"Behold, I send my messenger [Elijah=John the Baptist] **to clear the way before ME . . .** " But then He switches (without any difficulty) and instead of saying, "*And I will suddenly come to My Temple,*" *this Messenger* says,

And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple

... so, it looks as though "Me", God the Father, is *interchangeable* with this *other* "Messenger", who is called "the Lord", and Who owns the Temple of God.

4. He is called **"The Messenger of the Covenant"** in whom we delight.

... so, the Messenger Who will bring to us the *infinitely* superior New Covenant, the Messenger Who *owns* the Temple of God, and the Messenger Who is called "the Lord", is the second Person of the Godhead, the Incarnate God, and the Darling of the Trinity, Jesus, the Christ.

2. Why Must He Be Like a "Refiner's Fire", and like "Fuller's Soap"?

We were created in the very Image of God with the potential to reverence God, and trust Him, glorify Him, and obey Him with Joy, but we were born in iniquity, and in sin did our mothers conceive us. So, we are shot through with the impurity of Rebellion and Unbelief, and we "fall short" of God's Glory, we trample the Glory of God under our feet with utter disgust.

And you don't have to believe me. You can prove this to yourself. For example, you can notice how readily your heart inclines to those things that will show your strengths to other people, and how resistant your heart is to communion with God in solitude.

So, we are Impure both "by nature" and "by practice". But God will have no "alloys" in Heaven. **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."** And yet, God has determined that He will have a redeemed people in Heaven. And this will *not* be a smidgen. The Father's Banquet Hall will be full! But for that to come to pass, God must be a Refiner's Fire, and He must be Fuller's Soap. Because, if God would be a Forest Fire, Heaven would be empty. If He would become an incinerating Fire, Heaven would be empty. If God would be a Soap that

doesn't sting, Heaven would be empty. So, unless God becomes both a Refiner's Fire and Fuller's Soap, Heaven would be empty, and God's Decree for a happy people, who have been redeemed by what God alone has done for them, to fill the Father's Banquet Hall, would never come to pass.

But maybe Heaven *will* be empty. How do we know that Heaven will not be empty? Or, to put it another way, "*How do we know that, somewhere down the line, that God will just get fed up with our sin and rebellion, and that God will just abandon us?*" How do we know God won't do that? We don't *deserve* Salvation. So, why are we not simply consumed? Why does Jesus come as a Refiner's Fire and like Fuller's Soap? Verse 6 gives the Answer:

For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

... now all by itself, this verse doesn't make much sense. For example, what if God were *immutably determined* to be a Forest Fire? Or an Incinerator? Or a Soap that doesn't sting? What if God was Immutable in His unrelenting Wrath? What kind of Immutability is it that *guarantees* that we are not consumed?

It is a "Covenant-Keeping Immutability". According to verse 1, the Lord comes as "the Messenger of the [New] Covenant." So, the Reason Jesus is a Refiner's Fire and *not* a Forest Fire, the Reason He is Fuller's Soap and *not* merely any kind of Soap, is because God made a Covenant. And Jesus is the *Emissary* of that Covenant. He *confirms* that Covenant and *seals* that Covenant with His Own Blood. And over in **Hebrews 13:20**, the precious Blood of Jesus is called:

... the Blood of the eternal Covenant.

So, this is what never changes: the Free, Sovereign Choice of God to save sinners. "**I have loved you,' says the Lord . . . and "I the Lord do not change."** Therefore, [because that is true] **you are not consumed.**" Therefore, Jesus is a Refiner's Fire and not a Forest Fire. He is Fuller's Soap and not some cheap Windex.

3. How Can We Experience His Fire as “Refining” and Not “Consuming”?

Verse 5 makes it clear that when God comes, not *everyone* will be refined. Some will be consumed.

Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the Lord of hosts.

This verse is not about the Work of Refinement (Sanctification). This is the final Judgment of Condemnation. And it is ever clearer in 4:1:

For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the Lord of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."

So, when the Lord comes, some will be refined, but others will be consumed. So, how can we be sure to experience the Fire of God as “refining” and not “consuming?” And before I tell you what the Answer is, I must first tell you what the Answer simply CANNOT be. The Answer cannot be:

get rid of your own Sin.

... because if you got rid of your own Sin, you would not need Refining. Refining is only for dirty, guilty sinners! You also cannot hear the Question, “*How do I qualify to get refined?*” and then answer it by saying, “*Get rid of your Sin!*” Because that’s what refining does. It burns up Sin. So, how, then, does a dirty, guilty sinner *qualify* to have his Sin burned up? First, by having Sin to be burned, and, secondly, by recognizing and admitting that you have Sin to be burned, and then, thirdly, by humbling yourself to trust that God will refine you and not consume you.

But, if it takes the merciful Fire of God to destroy the rebellion of Sin, what can a person “do” to obtain that Mercy? And the Answer throughout the entirety of the Bible is:

Trust in the purifying Mercy of God!

... or to put it the way Malachi puts it again and again:

Fear God...

... which simply means fear to dishonor him with your unbelief. Fear the irreverence of distrust. Fear the impulse to jump out of the refining Fire of Mercy into the Forest Fire of Judgment because it looks cooler. Trust the Goodness of God. Believe that His Ways are the Ways to infinite Joy. Don't doubt His Expertise as a Refiner.

The Way to experience the Fire of Christ as “refining”, and not as “consuming”, is to trust His Promise to bring us through the Fire to endless Joy. Salvation is by Grace and through Faith, in the purifying Mercy of God.

4. What Is Life Like for Us in the Refiner's Fire?

The most important thing to say is that it is a Life of powerful Confidence in God. And the Foundation of our Confidence is this Promise:

The Furnace of Affliction for the child of God
is always for Refinement and never for Destruction.

For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

... which simply means that Life in the Refiner's Fire is a Life of Trust and reverential Fear in the unchanging, purifying Love of God.

And perhaps the next most important thing to say is that there is no “painless path” to Heaven. Why? Because Jesus said:

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

... and nobody on earth is pure in heart. Which means that, unless God does something, nobody will see God. So, it is no more possible to become pure *painlessly* than it is to be burned *painlessly*. Purity comes through the Refining Fire. And the Fire has two forms:

1. The Fire of Affliction
2. The Fire of intentional Self-denial

So, what is Life like for us inside the Refiner's Fire? More than anything else, it is the unshakable Trust that all the paths of the Lord are steadfast Love and Faithfulness. And on the Path to Purity and Heaven, the other Truth is this:

No pain, no gain

Both things are true: The Lord is like a Refiner's Fire, and a Refiner's Fire is a Fire that burns.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.